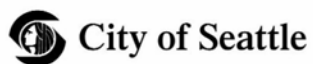


# Human Services Department



## Strategic Investment Plan

2003 - 2004



City of Seattle

April 7, 2004

“The moral test of a government is how it treats those who are at the dawn of life, the children; those who are in the twilight of life, the aged; and those who are in the shadow of life, the sick, the needy, and the handicapped.”

– Hubert H. Humphrey –

## **Executive Summary**

Through their City government, the people of Seattle invest in many different assets that together build a strong, vibrant community. They invest in public utilities to provide clean water and electrical power, in fire and police forces to protect public safety, and in streets, parks, libraries and other resources that enhance the quality of life in our neighborhoods. Among the most important investments our city makes are in services that promote the health and security of those who most need the community's help. For as a government, the City will be judged in large measure by how we treat our children, our elders and the disabled, our community's most vulnerable members.

The Human Services Department (HSD) is the arm of the City that works to ensure that these vulnerable members are free from hunger, safe in their homes, obtain education and job skills to be economically self sufficient, and maintain adequate health to live independently and with dignity. Our challenge is to fulfill those responsibilities with the limited resources available to local government.

In recognition of this challenge, the City Council adopted Ordinance #120890, which directs the Department to develop a strategic plan to guide the City's investments in human services. Specifically, the Council requested:

- i) A statement affirming the City's commitment to investing in human services;
- ii) A programmatic and financial compilation of the City's current investments in human services;
- iii) The City's goals which should articulate what is expected to be achieved through the City's investments in human services; overall goals, and goals for specific lines of business and program areas;
- iv) Comprehensive strategies for achieving these goals that look at how the City assists human service clients to improve the quality of their lives, as well as specific program measures;
- v) Systems that ensure program accountability including specific outcomes and performance measures at both the line of business and program level;
- vi) Evaluation and financial tools that will allow the City to assess the effectiveness of its investments in human services; and
- vii) A schedule for updating and evaluating the City's strategic investment plan for human services.

The Index identifies the sections of this plan that respond to each of these Council directives. The Executive Summary provides the context for the City's Human Services investments and charts the strategic direction we intend to pursue to meet the challenges of our times. The Plan will also guide HSD's future grant applications and distribution of city resources.

## The Context

Seattle's involvement in providing human services began in earnest during the Boeing recession of the early 1970s, when tens of thousands of factory workers were laid off, unemployment reached near-record levels and thousands of families lost their homes because they could not afford to pay their mortgages. While poverty was not new to Seattle, especially in its African-American and refugee communities, the Boeing recession brought poverty to the attention of policy makers and the general public as never before. In response to that crisis, volunteer food banks, health clinics, and community action agencies sprang up to meet the urgent needs of Seattle's people.

The City did not have a legal mandate to provide human services, nor experience in managing human service programs. Prior to this period of time, human services were viewed as a state and federal responsibility. However, Seattle's leaders could not ignore the hardships that were so evident among the populace, and organized a department for human services (initially named the Department of Human Resources) to help the non-profit community agencies that were taking the lead in responding to the challenge. At first, the City's role was as a conduit for federal funding, secured by Seattle's legendary Senators Magnuson and Jackson, for the city's poor and unemployed. In this role, the City helped to reduce the human impact of the recession and, in the process, built strong partnerships with community-based organizations that have endured for three decades.

With the election of the Reagan administration, the federal government's role in providing human services began a precipitous decline. During that same period, another regional recession gripped the Seattle area, and the combination resulted in tremendous pressures on the city's food banks, health clinics, and other human service agencies. To make matters worse, the first effects of a national epidemic of homelessness were becoming evident in the increasing numbers of people seeking refuge in Seattle's shelters and on its streets. Faced with these realities, Mayor Royer and City Council decided in 1984 to begin using the City's own general fund resources to provide the "survival services" necessary to help those most in need.

As the City government and its non-profit partners gained experience, they became more effective in managing the complexities of providing services to diverse populations and in creating strategies for *preventing* poverty, as well as treating its symptoms. Working together, these partners began to shift the emphasis from simply providing shelter, food, and basic medical care to a broader spectrum of services designed to reintegrate disadvantaged populations within social and economic life of the community, and provide them with the tools to succeed.

During the 1990s, the City began to focus its human services to support other community goals, such as improving the educational system and strengthening families. Under the leadership of Mayor Rice, the City created a “Families and Education Levy” that provided nearly \$10 million each year for health care, family support workers, and other services for children and their families in direct support of the public schools.

In the past few years, in recognition of the challenges created by declining resources, the City has placed new emphasis on bringing the City’s policies and investments into *alignment* with those of our partners, including King County and United Way. The goal of that alignment is to focus the community’s resources on the most critical issues, and avoid duplication or wasted effort, so that more can be accomplished.

Hand-in-hand with that alignment is a new focus on *measuring outcomes*, rather than simply counting the units of service that are provided. For example, if our goal is to reduce the number of homeless families, we should measure the numbers of people who are able to regain a home and a foothold in the economy, rather than counting the numbers of bednights that are provided in our shelters. By focusing on outcomes, we can more accurately gauge what is working well and what must be improved, and make adjustments to become more effective.

### **Our Current Challenges**

Today our City contributes nearly \$29 million annually to human services through its general fund and Families and Education Levy<sup>1</sup>. Yet these resources, even when aligned with the contributions of King County and United Way, fall well short of the need. In addition, Seattle is funding a disproportionate share of regional human services in comparison to King County and the suburban cities.

Our community is currently facing new manifestations of two recurring challenges that have confronted our predecessors -- the human impact of economic recession, and the devolution of federal and state responsibility to local communities. The current economic recession in our region is now in its third year, with unemployment rates in Washington State among the highest in the nation. This economic environment makes the City’s role in delivering human services more difficult. It dramatically increases the number of Seattle citizens who are in need of vital services to sustain themselves and their families. Without regular work, more families struggle to put food on the table,

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<sup>1</sup> This dollar amount refers to general fund and Families and Education Levy dollars in the Human Services Department budget. Seattle spends 38 million dollars city-wide on regional human services. These dollars are part of the Human Services Department and Public Health Department budgets.

and some lose the roof over their heads. The demand for child care, employment and elder care continues to increase.

In addition, the stalled economy, together with shifting priorities, has severely reduced the amounts of federal, state and local resources available to meet those needs. As this community continues to struggle to recover from the recession, the Human Services Department must identify how our limited resources can have the greatest impact on the most critical problems. The Strategic Investment Plan is intended to chart a course for meeting that challenge.

### **How this Strategic Investment Plan was developed**

The Strategic Investment Plan was developed over an eight-month period by HSD, working with staff from the Office of Policy and Management and Department of Finance. Community stakeholders, including clients, other funders, providers and the faith community, contributed valuable perspectives and feedback. (See Appendix F: Community Involvement Process for a summary of stakeholder involvement.)

### **Highlights of the Plan**

The Strategic Investment Plan builds upon progress that has been made in recent years to coordinate the efforts of the major human service funding agencies and service providers, and to concentrate energy and resources on the most critical issues facing our community. To that end, Seattle, King County and United Way have worked together to adopt a common set of community goals and indicators that will be used to measure progress over time. Our first recommendation is designed to focus our City's resources on achieving those shared goals.

**Recommendation 1: The City will target its investments in human services to meet six community goals and will seek to influence a common set of community indicators, mutually developed and adopted by the City, King County and the United Way.**

#### **Community Goals**

The City will target its investments in human services so that community members have:

- Food to eat and a roof overhead
- Supportive relationships within families, neighborhoods and communities
- A safe haven from all forms of abuse and violence
- Health care to be as physically and mentally fit as possible

- Education and job skills to lead an independent life
- Equal access to high quality, culturally competent services

Figure 1. Relationship between Goals, Indicators, Strategies and Outcomes



By establishing this community framework for investing funds, City staff will have the ability to prioritize funding based on community goals and indicators. In the future, as we measure the results of our efforts against the indicators, it will be possible to determine which strategies are most effective, and to make the appropriate funding adjustments to achieve the greatest impact. Our second recommendation would commit the City to this rigorous and systematic system for targeting future resources.

**Recommendation 2:**

**The City will establish and fund an improved system of accountability, using rigorous evaluation and performance based contracts to ensure that City investments are achieving their intended results** (See Appendix C: Investment and Accountability System).

<sup>2</sup> Indicator evaluation will be done in partnership with other funders and systems to assure that investments evaluated are at a scale large enough to impact community-wide indicators (see Appendix C: Investment and Accountability System)

To accomplish this goal HSD will:

- Work with United Way, King County and other funders to set specific targets for influencing a common set of community indicators
- Fund services that have clearly defined outcomes and performance measures.
- Implement an improved program evaluation model designed in partnership with community stakeholders who will assist in developing evaluation questions, collecting data and analyzing results
- Set aside up to 1% of General Funds from every RFP to fund evaluations. Although this will initially be a small sum, by adding to it incrementally and using it to leverage other funds, we will develop our capacity to conduct evaluations to assure the highest possible return on the city's human service investments. Our evaluation strategy will include both program area outcome evaluation to measure the effectiveness of various programs at achieving intended outcomes, and community indicator evaluation to measure the overall health of our community and the types of investments most effective in improving community conditions.

As we work with our partners to measure our progress over time, we will begin to see which strategies and programs have the greatest impact on the social, economic and physical well-being of our residents. Funding will be shifted to reflect those findings.

Becoming more disciplined in our analytical approach should also provide us with the knowledge to intervene earlier, when families and individuals first begin to experience difficulties, rather than when they must rely on emergency services. As our programs become more effective, we propose to shift a greater proportion of our City resources from emergency services to strategies that build the abilities of families and individuals to participate in the economic and civic life of the community. Our third recommendation signals the City's intent to move in that direction.

**Recommendation 3:**

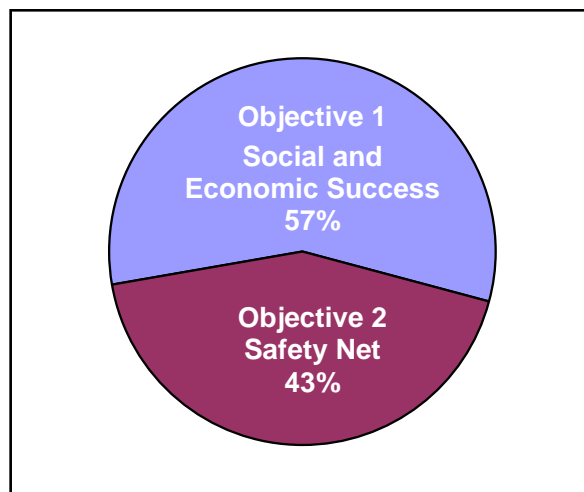
**The City recognizes the dual importance of the following funding objectives: preserving a safety net of essential emergency services and investing in programs that help vulnerable persons achieve social and economic success. The City will work to preserve a safety net of essential emergency services, and over time, strive to increase the percentage of its human services resources that are invested in programs that help vulnerable persons achieve social and economic success.**

To that end, all City human service investments will focus on two objectives:

- **Objective 1: Helping People Achieve Social and Economic Success**  
These prevention programs help vulnerable persons **build a path to long-term success and self sufficiency** and address **crisis prevention** – i.e., those services which prevent the kinds of problems that lead to crisis. Program examples include child care, youth and senior employment, rent and utility assistance and health promotion.
- **Objective 2: Preserving the Safety Net**  
These programs help vulnerable persons **maintain their physical or economic independence and stability** or address **crisis intervention**, i.e., those services that help people move out of crisis and towards independence. Program examples include shelters, domestic violence assistance and food banks.

A complete listing of strategies, programs and outcomes by objective and goal may be found in Appendix A1.

Figure 2. 2003 Local Investment



Through this policy, City investments in prevention programs and programs that build a path to long-term social and economic success will increase, and over the long term, the need for “safety net” services will be reduced.

For this strategy to be successful however, the state and federal government must both continue to provide funding for safety net programs that they alone have the resources to provide. They must also support local efforts to develop innovative approaches to prevention that will ultimately reduce the need for public safety net services. To help ensure that state and federal funding for human services best complements the City’s new direction for human services, we will continue our current policy of advocating to the state and federal government to provide a sufficient level of funding for safety net programs.

Research has demonstrated that early investments in children – quality child care that supports school readiness and early health care – result in a high rate of return. A strategy that emphasizes prevention and early intervention must begin with children and youth. Our fourth recommendation reflects the Mayor's commitment to reduce disproportionality and focus City resources on children and youth with the greatest needs.

**Recommendation 4:**

**Future City investments in children and youth services will focus resources on children and youth with the greatest needs in order to reduce disproportionality in education, health and safety.**

The City will work to reduce disproportionality in education, health, and safety. By aligning human service investments with specific outcomes such as those in the Mayor's Children and Youth Strategy, we will be able to better target our investments to influence community indicators for low income children and children of color. Specifically we will strive to increase rates of school readiness, academic achievement and high school completion and reduce rates of youth arrest and recidivism.

In recent years it has become apparent that the existing system serving children and youth is fragmented, with multiple funders, multiple goals and initiatives, and no clear strategies for children and youth throughout the County.

This fragmentation stands in stark contrast to the community's well-coordinated approach to services for seniors, in which Seattle, King County, United Way and community agencies are united in their goals and funding strategies. Our fifth recommendation would extend that unified approach to meeting the needs of children and youth.

**Recommendation 5:**

**The City will work with United Way, King County, DSHS, private funders and interested suburban cities to form a new King County Alliance for Children and Youth.**

A coordinated system to address children and youth issues, much as we have for senior programs, will enable us to improve investment decisions, become more effective and produce better outcomes for children and youth. In phase one, the partners will focus on clarifying funding roles, accountability measures and outcome reporting. One of the goals of this effort will be to achieve greater equity in funding support across the region. By identifying mutual issues of concern and building off of other community efforts, such as King County's newly formed Citizens Commission on Regional Human Services, we hope to identify opportunities for other players to contribute their fair share of support for human services.

## **What will change as a result of the Strategic Investment Plan**

Building upon strong partnerships and three decades of experience, the Human Services Strategic Investment Plan is designed to create these changes:

- City investments will remain focused on achieving six community goals that have been jointly developed with our funding partners.
- Seattle's investments will focus on influencing a set of community indicators e.g., increased academic achievement and high school completion rates for students of color and low-income students and increased percentage of people 65 years and older who have good health and quality of life.
- The City will move away from purchasing units of service and fund programs that measure outcomes.
- The City will dedicate more effort to improving evaluation methods and using the results to drive its funding decisions.
- Dollars will be redirected to programs that achieve the best results.
- The percent of funds invested in programs that lead to economic and social success will increase, resulting in long term financial savings and a reduction in human suffering.
- A new Alliance for Children and Youth will be created to coordinate the actions of the major funders on behalf of the region's young people.